

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3845

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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SUBJECT: BELIZE CITY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

1. IN THE BELIZE CITY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS HELD DECEMBER 11, THE UDP (OPPOSITION PARTY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL) WON SIX SEATS OF THE NINE MEMBER CITY COUNCIL; REMAINING THREE SEATS WERE WON BY PUP (GOVERNMENT PARTY) CANDIDATES. IN ALL PREVIOUS ELECTIONS UNDER THE PRESENT AT-LARGE SYSTEM (I.E., 1971, 1968, 1965 AND 1962), THE PUP HAS WON ALL NINE SEATS.

2. COMMENT:

(A) LOSS OF CONTROL OF THE BELIZE CITY MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IS A SEVERE SETBACK FOR NEW GOVERNMENT OF PREMIER GEORGE PRICE AND TENDS TO CONFIRM TREND AWAY FROM PUP PREVIOUSLY MANIFESTED IN DIMINUTION OF PARTY'S MAJORITY IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FROM 19-1 (1968) TO 12-6 IN OCTOBER 1974 GENERAL ELECTIONS.

(B) BY HIS OWN ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AS WELL AS THE PARTICIPATION OF MOST OF HIS MINISTERS IN FINAL TWO WEEKS OF BELIZE CITY CAMPAIGN, PREMIER PRICE HAD STAKED HIS OWN PRESTIGE AND THAT OF HIS GOVERNMENT ON THE OUTCOME.

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(C) SINCE BELIZE CITY GOVERNMENT IS, IN EFFECT, A FISCAL APPEND-AGE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT (A FACT THE PUP DID ITS BEST TO EXPLOIT IN ITS CAMPAIGN ORATORY), AND SINCE ALMOST ENTIRE ROSTER OF CITY GOVERNMENT JOBS HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN AVAILABLE TO TAKE CARE OF PUP PATRONAGE REQUIREMENTS, LOSS OF CITY COUNCIL CONTROL MEANS GOVERNMENT WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO PAY OFF POLITICAL OBLIGATIONS WITH JOBS, CONTRACTS, AND VARIOUS PERMITS AND LICENSES IN BELIZE CITY. THESE HAVE BEEN KEY TOOLS WITH WHICH THREE OF THE MOST POWERFUL PUP POLITICIANS, (I.E. PRICE, ROGERS AND COURTENAY, ALL OF WHOSE CONSTITUENCIES ARE IN BELIZE CITY) HAVE BUILT THEIR RESPECTIVE ELECTORAL BASES. ROUGHLY ONE-THIRD OF THE COUNTRY'S VOTERS LIVE IN BELIZE CITY.

(D) PUP LOSS IS BEING ATTRIBUTED TO A VARIETY OF CIRCUMSTANCES, MOST PLAUSIBLE OF WHICH ARE (1) RISING PRICES AND THE GENERAL ECONOMIC MALAISE LED MANY VOTERS AT MUNICIPAL AS WELL AS NATIONAL LEVEL TO VOTE AGAINST PARTY IN POWER, (2) UNUSUALLY LOW TURNOUT HURT THE PUP, (3) RESULTS OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS DEMONSTRATED THAT VOTE FOR UDP NOT WASTED AS MAY HAVE SEEMED THE CASE IN PREVIOUS ELECTIONS, (4) ANNOYANCE WITH PREMIER -- REPORTED TO HAVE CROPPED UP AMONG MANY OTHERWISE LOYAL PUP VOTERS -- FOR HIS HAVING NAMED LEFTIST ASSAD SHOMAN TO POWERFUL CABINET POST DESPITE LATTER'S DEFEAT AT POLLS, (5) QUALIFICATIONS AND GENERAL ATTRACTIVENESS OF UDP CANDIDATES JUDGED BY VOTERS TO BE SUPERIOR TO PUP INCUMBENTS, (6) RISING DISSATISFACTION WITH LEVEL OF COMPETENCE OF PREVIOUS COUNCIL, AND (7) DISSATISFACTION OF VOTERS WITH DECLINING QUALITY OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES.

(E) UNDER PUP CONTROL, CITY'S FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT HAS LARGELY ESCAPED PUBLIC SCRUTINY. BELIEF IS CURRENT HERE THAT WHEN NEW UDP COUNCILMEN GET THEIR HANDS ON THE BOOKS, A COLORFUL ARRAY OF PREVIOUS IMPROPRIETIES WILL BE EXPOSED. THUS, DAMAGE TO PRICE GOVERNMENT COULD PROVE EVEN MORE SERIOUS THAN THAT ALREADY VISIBLE IN ELECTION RETURNS.

(F) IMPLICATIONS FOR BELIZE INDEPENDENCE QUESTION, WHILE NOT MAJOR ARE NOT ENTIRELY NEGLIGIBLE. PREMIER PRICE'S MUNICIPAL CAMPAIGN SPEECHES REPEATEDLY TIED CONTINUED PUP CONTROL OF BELIZE CITY GOVERNMENT TO COAT TAILS OF PARTY'S INDEPENDENCE MANIFESTO, THE PLATFORM DOCUMENT USED IN THE RECENT NATIONAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ELECTIONS. RESULT SUGGESTS PULLING POWER OF THIS RATHER ILLOGICAL LINKAGE IS SOMEWHAT WEAKER THAN PRICE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE. GAWF

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